

## Porter: Tycoon Miles Nadal donates to a centre for Regent Park youth

Tycoon Miles Nadal sees his old self, the underdog, in the youth of Regent Park. So he donated \$1.55 million to rebuild an after-school space for them.

By Catherine Porter Feature Writer

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Miles Nadal, centre, shown with wife Kelly, right, an daughter Sara, left, is donating \$1.55 million to add an after-school clubhouse for youth in Regent Park/Cabbagetown. Photo taken April 18, 2011.

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I am shivering on the edge of a construction site in Cabbagetown, listening to a speech called “Miles from nowhere.”

It’s Miles Nadal’s graduation ruminations, his life story. It starts with him as a young, working-class teenager launching his business career by taking photos of kids at summer camp, and ends here on this blustery day, with him donating \$1.55 million to rebuild an after-school space for Regent Park teens.

“I paid \$512 for a Nikon FTn camera — my father thought I was insane — on loan from Henry’s pawnshop and converted the bathroom into a darkroom, so my parents had to go downstairs to use the bathroom,” Nadal recalls. He is addressing the knot of family and eager Toronto Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club board members gathered outside their clubhouse, which is undergoing a \$6-million renovation to lure even more kids away from trouble on the south of Gerrard St.

Nadal, now 53, is the only one not shivering — he’s relaxed and tan, dressed to kill with a purple pocket square poking from his jacket’s breast pocket. He wasn’t going to tell this story, of course. But he can’t help himself.

“I was shooting 10,000 kids a summer at my peak. By 16, I had four employees. Remember, I can sell. . .”

Yes, indeed. Nadal is the CEO of MDC Partners Inc., an ever-shifting conglomerate of ad and design shops — including Bruce Mau Design — that expects to pull in revenues of \$870 million this year. It arose from Nadal’s photography company and evolved through public relations, events staging, postage stamps, even pumpkin seeds before settling into the world of marketing services.

Along the way, Nadal has become very rich (he doesn’t dismiss a report pegging his worth at \$100 million). And since his dear friend died on a plane he was supposed to be flying in 18 years ago, he’s turned his mind to giving it away.

His legacy, to date, includes:

- York University’s downtown Miles S. Nadal Management Centre: \$1 million.
- Leadership Sinai (Mount Sinai’s young leaders group): \$2.5 million
- The Miles S. Nadal Jewish Community Centre: \$2.5 million, although he originally signed up for \$1.8 million, he says, and then helped raise millions more.
- The construction site that will become the Miles and Kelly Nadal Youth Centre, located on the fourth floor Toronto Kiwanis Boys & Girls Club, is the latest addition.

“We have a family saying,” says Nadal, an obsessive collector of quotes. (He sent me a book of them he had published). “One hundred years from now, no one will remember the car you drove, the house you lived in, for that matter how much money you had in the bank, but the world will be a different place if you make a difference in the life of the young.”

The clubhouse, which has been running in the former church since 1939, was shared by two age groups. Primary school kids would walk there after school to have a hot meal, take art and dance classes, play basketball in the gym and read books with tutors. After they were escorted home, the teenagers would take over, hanging out in the lounge and making dinner together from 6 to 10 p.m.

But, after four young men were shot dead in Regent Park last fall — one a much-loved former staff member at the club — it became painfully clear the older group needed a safe space each day before 6 p.m.

That wasn’t included in the original renovation plans, which will double the centre’s size and enrollment. But once Nadal heard about the club from a colleague, he decided to fund the addition of a top floor, which when reopened this summer will be the permanent teenagers’ centre, complete with a computer lab, recording studio and lounge space.

Nadal sees himself in the teens of Regent Park — the underdog, full of potential.

And he wants to launch a speaker’s series here, hosting people like him, with classic rags-to-riches tales.

“Miles from nowhere,” paints a young Nadal growing up in a small apartment near Bathurst and Eglinton. His mom worked for the rental company (hence, their cheap rent) and his dad, who had dropped out of high school to help support his siblings, was selling men’s clothing at Tip Top Tailors.

In his third year of university, Nadal launched Action Photographics, taking pictures of sport teams like the Jays and Argos. He hired his parents to work for him. It grew so quickly, he says, he dropped his classes to work full-time. Since then, he’s never looked back.

He now spends his time between homes in the U.S., Nassau and Canada.

The morale, says Nadal, is “Anything’s possible. Think about it: I came from a family with no formal business background, no economic means, no connections, no resources. And I built a multi-million dollar enterprise. It shows you dare to dream. Like Ray Croc said, ‘Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.’

Never give up. Never give up.”



Catherine Porter is a former columnist and feature writer for the Toronto Star.